A CULINARY HISTORY & COOKBOOK

The Forgotten Flavors of Bihar

From the sattu tin to the wedding sweet box — a rediscovery of one of India's most distinct, and most overlooked, regional cuisines.

BOOK · FOURTEEN CHAPTERS · A RECIPE COMPANION

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CHAPTER ONE

Why Bihar's Food Was Forgotten

On the strange asymmetry between a region's culinary richness and its national reputation.

Ask most people outside Bihar to name a Bihari dish, and the conversation stalls after litti-chokha. Ask them to name a Punjabi dish, a Gujarati dish, a Bengali dish, and the list arrives easily, seasoned with decades of restaurant menus and food television. This is not a reflection of what Bihar has cooked for centuries. It is a reflection of what got written down, marketed, and exported — and what didn't.

Bihar's culinary obscurity has a history, and it is not a culinary one. It is economic and political. For much of the twentieth century, Bihar was defined in the national

imagination by poverty, migration, and the departure of its young men to Delhi, Mumbai, and the Gulf in search of work. A state known for what it lost, not what it made, does not get a cuisine chapter in the glossy cookbook. Its dishes travelled with labourers in steel tiffins, not with chefs in white coats. They fed people who had no time to explain them.

> A cuisine's reputation is not decided by its flavor. It is decided by who gets to describe it, and to whom.

There is also the matter of humility built into the food itself. Bihari cooking rarely announces itself with cream, or color, or performance. Sattu is ground gram flour, plain to look at, everywhere in the region, and treated at home as something too ordinary to be proud of — the way a family stops noticing its own good handwriting.

Litti is a ball of roasted dough. Chokha is mashed vegetables. None of it photographs the way a Mughlai curry does. None of it needed to. It was built for calories, for heat, for a day of physical work, not for admiration.

A NOTE ON GEOGRAPHY

Bihar is not one cuisine but at least three, loosely mapped onto its historical sub-regions: Bhojpuri cooking in the west, built around wheat, sattu, and mustard oil; Mithila (Maithil) cooking in the north, defined by its closeness to the rivers and its fish; and Magadhi and Anga traditions in the south and east, where the food of Patna, Gaya, and Bhagalpur takes on its own character. This book moves between all three, naming the region when a dish is specific to it.

What is changing now is not the food. Sattu is being rebranded abroad as a protein

superfood. Makhana, once a humble fasting snack, has become an international export lining supermarket shelves as a health-conscious replacement for popcorn. Thekua, a jaggery-sweetened, deep-fried Chhath offering once found only in Bihari homes each October and November, is beginning to appear in specialty stores and on the shelves of small food brands run by people who grew up watching their grandmothers make it by hand. The ingredients have not changed. The audience has. This book exists because that audience deserves the whole cuisine, not the two or three dishes that happened to survive translation.

CHAPTER TWO

Sattu: The Grain of Resilience

The roasted gram flour that has fed field labourers, pilgrims, and now, health food shoppers.

Sattu is roasted chana (Bengal gram) or a mix of roasted grains, ground to a fine flour the color of wet sand. On its own it looks like almost nothing. Mixed with cold water, a pinch of salt, a squeeze of lemon, and a chopped green chili, it becomes sattu ka sharbat — a drink that has cooled Bihari field workers through summers long before refrigeration existed in most homes. It is, in the truest sense, a survival food: dense in protein, needing no fire to prepare, stable for months in a cloth sack, and cheap enough that no household in the region has ever been without it.

What makes sattu remarkable is its range. The same flour that becomes a savoury summer drink is also the stuffing at the heart of litti, kneaded with spices, onion, garlic, mustard oil, and ajwain, then packed into wheat dough and roasted over coals or an open flame until the crust blisters. It appears again as sattu paratha, sattu laddu sweetened with jaggery for festival plates, and as a quick paste eaten straight with a spoon by anyone in a hurry. Few single ingredients in Indian cooking move this comfortably between drink, stuffing, snack, and dessert.

WHY IT TRAVELLED WELL

Sattu needs no refrigeration, no cooking, and almost no equipment — only water and a container. This made it the default provision for pilgrims walking to religious sites, for farm labourers working far from home kitchens, and, in the twentieth century, for migrants boarding trains to cities where they weren't sure when their next hot meal would come. It is a food object with the memory of movement built into it.

There is a class dimension worth naming honestly. For much of its history, sattu was coded as poor people's food — cheap, filling, unglamorous, associated with manual labour rather than leisure. That coding is precisely what kept it out of the restaurant menus that shaped how India's cuisines got known nationally and internationally. It is only in the last decade, as global food culture rediscovered an

appetite for "ancient grains" and minimally processed protein, that sattu has been allowed back into rooms it never should have had to leave. The irony is sharp: the food that sustained Bihar's poorest is now marketed at a premium to people who have never done a day of the labour it was built to fuel.

> Sattu was never waiting to be discovered. It was waiting for the rest of the country to stop looking away from where it was already eating.

CHAPTER THREE

Litti-Chokha: Fire, Ash, and Identity

Bihar's one dish that made it into the national conversation — and why it deserves to have brought friends.

Litti-chokha occupies a strange position: it is simultaneously Bihar's most famous export and the dish most likely to be reduced to a caricature by people who have eaten it once, at a mela, wrapped in newspaper. To understand it properly means understanding it as two separate techniques that happen to share a plate.

The litti itself is a ball of wheat dough stuffed with spiced sattu, and it is defined entirely by how it's cooked. The traditional method uses cow-dung cakes or wood coals, burying the dough balls directly in the embers until the outer crust chars and

cracks, then brushing off the ash and finishing with a generous dip in melted ghee. This is not an incidental detail. The smoky, slightly bitter char from direct-ember cooking is what separates a good litti from an oven-baked imitation, in the same way that a tandoor separates real naan from anything baked in a home oven. Litti cooked without live fire is a different, lesser food wearing the same name.

Chokha is the dish's other half and arguably its more versatile one: vegetables, usually potato, eggplant, or tomato, roasted directly over the same fire until blackened and soft, then peeled, mashed by hand, and dressed with mustard oil, garlic, green chili, and chopped onion. The smoke that flavors the vegetable is the same smoke that flavors the litti — the whole dish is, in effect, a single cooking event split into two forms.

BEYOND POTATO

Baingan (eggplant) chokha and tamatar (tomato) chokha are just as central as aloo chokha, and many Bihari households serve two or three chokhas alongside a single batch of litti. Some cooks add a fourth: a simple chokha of boiled and mashed matar (green peas) in winter, when the season's fresh peas arrive.

What gets lost when litti-chokha travels outside Bihar is everything around the plate: the fact that it is often a communal cooking event, made in large batches over an outdoor fire pit for gatherings rather than as a quick individual meal; the fact that the ratio and seasoning of the sattu stuffing varies house to house the way a family's dal recipe does elsewhere; and the fact that this is, at its core, food designed to be eaten with your hands, torn open while still warm enough to release steam. A litti

served cold, pre-packaged, without ghee, without the char, is not really the dish — it's a rumor of it.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Ghugni Hour

How a bowl of stewed peas became Bihar's unofficial evening ritual.

Every region has a food that belongs to a specific hour of the day more than to any meal category. In Bihar, that food is ghugni — dried yellow or white peas (or sometimes black chana), soaked overnight and simmered with onion, ginger, garlic, and a blend of spices until they collapse into a thick, dark, faintly sweet stew. It is sold from carts and small stalls in the late afternoon and evening, ladled into paper bowls, topped with chopped onion, a squeeze of lime, sev, and sometimes a boiled egg, and eaten standing up, on the walk home.

Ghugni's genius is its economy. Dried peas are cheap and store indefinitely, which

means a vendor can prepare a large batch overnight and sell it across an entire evening without the ingredient cost that makes meat or fish snacks a riskier business. It is street food built for a place where margins are thin and appetite is constant — filling enough to substitute for dinner, cheap enough to buy twice in one evening, and flexible enough to be dressed up with an egg for someone with a little more to spend, or kept simple for someone with less.

> Ghugni is what Bihar eats between the meals that get written down — which is exactly why it never got written down itself.

Inside the home, ghugni takes a gentler form, often made for breakfast alongside puri, or served as a light evening dish during festival seasons when heavier food

has already dominated the day. Its versatility — equally at home as a five-rupee street snack or a festival side dish — is part of why it never developed the singular, fixed identity that would have made it easy to export as "the" Bihari street food. It simply does too many jobs to be reduced to one.

CHAPTER FIVE

Dal-Bhat-Roti: The Architecture of a Meal

What an ordinary Bihari lunch reveals about the region's cooking logic.

Strip away the festival dishes and the street food, and the daily architecture of a Bihari meal is disarmingly simple: rice (bhat), a thin dal, a vegetable sabzi, roti, and, when affordable, a piece of fish or a spoon of achar. What distinguishes it from its neighbours is not the list of components — that list repeats across much of North India — but the seasoning logic underneath it.

Mustard oil is the region's dominant fat, used both raw, for its sharp bite in chokha and salads, and heated until it smokes, to mellow that sharpness before vegetables go in. Panch phoron — a five-spice blend of

fenugreek, nigella, cumin, black mustard, and fennel seeds, more commonly associated with Bengal — also appears in Bihari kitchens, particularly in Mithila, a reminder that Bihar's eastern reaches share as much culinary DNA with Bengal as they do with the Hindi heartland to their west.

THE DAL THAT ISN'T A DAL

Arhar dal (split pigeon pea) is the everyday lentil of choice across Bihar, cooked thin, often finished with a tadka of garlic and dried red chili fried in mustard oil. It's worth noting how deliberately thin it's kept compared to dals elsewhere — a texture built to be poured over rice, not scooped with bread.

What's easy to miss, eating a single Bihari thali, is how much regional variation sits inside that simple structure. A Bhojpuri

household's sabzi will lean on garlic and mustard oil's raw pungency; a Maithil household closer to the rivers will lean on panch phoron and, when in season, fish; a Magadhi household further south may cook with a gentler hand on the chili. The same four-item template — rice, dal, sabzi, roti — produces genuinely different meals depending on which corner of the state you're sitting in, which is exactly the kind of internal diversity that gets flattened when a cuisine is only known from the outside by its one or two famous dishes.

CHAPTER SIX

Rivers and Fish: The Mithila Table

In the north, where the Kosi and the Gandak define the land, fish is not a delicacy — it's a category of daily food.

Bihar is a riverine state before it is anything else, threaded by the Ganga, the Kosi, the Gandak, and the Son, and nowhere is that geography more visible on the plate than in Mithila, the Maithil-speaking region in the north. Here, fish is not the occasional festive indulgence it can be elsewhere in North India — it is woven into the everyday and ceremonial food alike. A Maithil wedding without fish on the menu is nearly unthinkable; a Maithil household proverb even holds "maachh-bhaat" — fish and rice — as the ideal of a

good meal, the regional equivalent of Bengal's own maach-bhaat pride.

Rohu and Katla, both freshwater carp, dominate, typically prepared in a thin, mustard-oil-forward curry finished with panch phoron and, often, a hit of raw mustard paste for sharpness. Dried and fermented fish preparations also appear, a preservation method born of the same practical need that shaped sattu — a way to keep protein edible through seasons when fresh catch wasn't reliable.

> Ask a Maithil family what makes a meal complete, and the answer is rarely a spice. It's a river.

The Mithila fish tradition also carries the region's most distinctive folk art into the kitchen: Madhubani painting, the geometric, brightly colored folk art style

native to this area, uses fish as one of its most recurring motifs, a symbol of fertility and abundance painted onto walls and, later, canvas and paper for centuries. Food and art, in Mithila, are drawing from the same well of imagery — the fish that feeds the family is also the fish painted at the threshold to welcome guests.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Achar: The Art of Waiting

Pickling as patience, and what it means to build flavor across a whole season.

No Bihari pantry is complete without a shelf of achar — pickles built from mango, lemon, chili, or mixed vegetables, packed into mustard oil with a heavy hand of turmeric, fenugreek, and nigella seed, and left to mature in direct sunlight for weeks. This is food that cannot be rushed. A jar of kaccha aam ka achar (raw mango pickle) made in the peak of summer, when unripe mangoes are cheapest and most sour, won't reach its full flavor until months later, by which point the mustard oil has drawn out the mango's bitterness and replaced it with something rounder and more complex.

The role achar plays on a Bihari plate is disproportionate to its portion size. A single

spoonful, eaten alongside dal-bhat or litti-chokha, is enough to cut through the richness of mustard oil and ghee elsewhere on the plate. It's a condiment doing structural work, not a garnish doing decorative work.

A HOUSEHOLD SKILL, NOT A RECIPE

Achar-making in Bihar has traditionally been passed down as a set of hand-judged ratios — how much oil until the mango is fully submerged, how many days of sun until the color deepens — rather than a written recipe with measured quantities. This is part of why the tradition is harder to preserve in writing: its real form lives in muscle memory and household routine, not on a page.

Preservation traditions like achar, and the dried fish and sattu discussed in earlier chapters, tell a consistent story about the values underneath Bihari cooking: a deep

practicality born from a region where seasonal scarcity was a real and recent memory for most households, and where a kitchen's job was to make sure nothing edible went to waste, and nothing flavorful had to wait for its season to be enjoyed.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Makhana: The Lotus Seed Renaissance

How a fasting-day snack from the ponds of Mithila became a global health food.

Makhana — fox nut, or lotus seed, harvested from the still ponds of the Mithila region, particularly around Darbhanga, Madhubani, and Purnia — is likely Bihar's most successful culinary export of the current decade, and the story of how it got there says a great deal about how regional foods finally cross over.

For generations, makhana held a specific, narrow role: a fasting-day food, eaten during religious vrats when grains were avoided, usually roasted plain or lightly fried and salted, or simmered into a mild kheer for festival occasions. Its harvesting is genuinely labor-intensive — the seeds are

gathered by hand from pond beds, often by workers wading into water for hours, then dried and popped over heat in a process that hasn't changed much in structure for generations. This labor, and the seasonal, regional nature of the crop, kept it a niche ingredient outside Bihar for a very long time.

> What changed wasn't the fox nut. What changed is that the rest of the world started looking for exactly what Mithila's ponds had been producing all along: a light, crunchy, protein-bearing snack with a short ingredient list.

The global wellness food movement's appetite for minimally processed, high-protein, gluten-free snacks arrived at

makhana's doorstep almost by accident, and Bihar answered with speed — roasted, flavored makhana (peri peri, salt and pepper, and other seasoned varieties) is now sold in premium snack aisles, often at prices that would have startled the fasting households who first depended on it as an affordable substitute for grain. It's a rare case of a regional Bihari staple making the leap from local necessity to national and international premium product within a single generation, and it offers something of a template for how other Bihari staples — sattu among them — might make the same journey.

CHAPTER NINE

Chhath: A Festival Cooked, Not Just Celebrated

Inside the four-day ritual where food preparation is itself an act of devotion — and thekua is its centerpiece.

Chhath Puja is Bihar's defining festival, observed with an intensity and a set of purity rules that make its food preparation unlike almost anything else in the region's calendar. Devotees fast for extended stretches across the festival's four days, offering prayers to the setting and rising sun from riverbanks and ponds, and every element of the food prepared for the offering — the prasad — is governed by rules of cleanliness so strict that many households designate a section of the

kitchen, or a cooking vessel, used only for Chhath.

Thekua sits at the center of that offering: a dense, deep-fried biscuit made from wheat flour, jaggery, and ghee, often pressed with a wooden mold to leave a decorative pattern on its surface before frying. It is sweet, dense, faintly crisp on the outside and firm within, and built to last — thekua keeps for weeks without refrigeration, which matters when it needs to remain edible as prasad shared across an entire community, not just a single sitting.

WHY JAGGERY, NOT SUGAR

Jaggery is close to non-negotiable in traditional thekua, both for its unrefined, mineral-forward sweetness and because it is considered a purer, less processed sweetener appropriate for prasad. The deep amber color it gives the finished thekua is, for many people who grew up with Chhath, as recognizable as the taste itself.

What makes thekua worth dwelling on, beyond its role in Chhath, is what it represents about food and identity for the Bihari diaspora. For migrants who left the state for work, thekua is very often the one dish that makes the journey back with them — carried in tins to cities across India and abroad, or recreated from memory in kitchens far from the rivers Chhath is meant to honor. A jar of thekua, more than almost any other Bihari food, functions as a portable piece of home. It is not a

coincidence that small food businesses built by people with roots in Bihar so often start with thekua: it is the dish most likely to already have an emotionally invested customer before a single jar is sold.

> Thekua doesn't need to be introduced to the people who grew up with it. It needs to be found by them, wherever they've ended up.

CHAPTER TEN

The Wedding Sweet Canon

Khaja, anarsa, tilkut, and the layered, laborious sweets that define a Bihari celebration.

If everyday Bihari food is built on restraint and practicality, wedding-feast food is its deliberate opposite — a display of labor, sugar, and ghee that exists precisely because ordinary meals don't allow for it. The sweets served at Bihari weddings are, almost without exception, more technically demanding than anything eaten day to day, and Silao, a small town near Nalanda, has become so associated with one of them — khaja — that the dish and the place are now spoken of as a single name: Silao khaja.

Khaja is a layered, flaky pastry, rolled and folded dozens of times to build paper-thin

layers before frying and soaking in sugar syrup, producing something closer in technique to a laminated pastry than to most Indian sweets. Its structure — audibly crisp, shattering into layers with the first bite — is the product of a skill set specific enough that it has remained genuinely a craft, not a home recipe most families attempt themselves. Anarsa, by contrast, is a rice-flour sweet, its dough fermented with jaggery over days before being shaped and coated in sesame seeds and fried, prized for the tangy depth that fermentation gives it, a flavor absent from sweets made without that waiting period.

BEYOND THE TWO FAMOUS NAMES

Gujiya, a fried, sweet-stuffed dumpling shared with much of North India, and various khoya- and besan-based laddus round out the wedding sweet table, alongside kheer made rich with reduced milk rather than the lighter makhana version reserved for fasting days. Sweetness, at a Bihari wedding, is treated as a spectrum to be explored across many small dishes, not delivered through one showpiece dessert.

What ties this chapter back to the book's larger argument is the labor itself. Khaja's dozens of folds, anarsa's days-long ferment, thekua's hand-pressed molds — none of these are quick. Bihar's celebratory food asks for time in a way that resists the pace of modern food media, which rewards dishes that photograph fast and explain themselves in fifteen seconds. A cuisine built around patience was always going to

have a harder time finding an audience in an attention economy built around speed. That difficulty is not a flaw in the food. It's a mismatch in the moment it was trying to be discovered in.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Makar Sankranti and the Tilkut Tradition

Sesame, jaggery, and the winter harvest festival that Gaya turned into an art form.

Where Chhath belongs to thekua, Makar Sankranti belongs to tilkut — a sweet made almost entirely of roasted sesame seeds pounded together with hot jaggery syrup, then beaten and folded with wooden mallets until the mixture turns glossy and can be shaped into flat discs or small rounds. The city of Gaya has, much like Silao and khaja, become nationally associated with tilkut, and Gaya's tilkut-makers — many from families that have specialized in the sweet for generations — are treated as craftspeople rather than simply cooks.

The choice of sesame is not incidental. Makar Sankranti marks the winter solstice's turn and the sun's movement into a new zodiac sign, and sesame and jaggery together are considered warming foods in Ayurvedic tradition, appropriate for the coldest point of the year. The festival's food logic, in other words, is seasonal medicine dressed as celebration — a pattern that recurs across Indian regional cuisines but is rarely spelled out for outsiders encountering the dish for the first time.

> Tilkut is what happens when a festival asks a kitchen a very specific question: what does the body need, right now, at the coldest point of the year? Sesame and jaggery are Bihar's answer.

Til-laddu, a simpler round version of the same sesame-jaggery combination, is made in home kitchens across the state for the same festival, existing alongside Gaya's more refined, craft-level tilkut as the home cook's version of the same seasonal idea. Together they illustrate something true of most Bihari festival food: there is almost always a version worth traveling for, made by specialists in a particular town, and a version any household can make on its own stove — and both are considered equally legitimate.

CHAPTER TWELVE

The Diaspora Kitchen

What happens to a cuisine when its cooks leave the region it grew up in.

Bihar has one of the largest internal and international migration histories of any Indian state, and that migration — whether to Kolkata and Mumbai in earlier generations, to Delhi and Bengaluru more recently, or to the Gulf, the Caribbean, Fiji, and Mauritius under indentured labor systems more than a century ago — has scattered Bihari food across the world in forms that rarely get traced back to their origin.

The Caribbean connection is especially striking and especially under-recognized. Indentured laborers from Bihar and eastern Uttar Pradesh, brought to Trinidad, Guyana, and Suriname in the nineteenth

century, carried food traditions that evolved over generations into what's now recognized as Indo-Caribbean cuisine — dishes like Trinidadian "roti" and curried preparations that trace a direct, if transformed, lineage back to the wheat-and-lentil cooking of the Bhojpuri region those laborers left behind. Few people eating a Trinidadian doubles today think of it as connected to Bihar, but the culinary thread is real.

CLOSER TO HOME

Within India, Bihari migrant communities in cities like Delhi, Kolkata, and Mumbai have built their own smaller ecosystems of litti-chokha stalls and sattu shops, often clustered in neighborhoods with dense Bihari populations, functioning less as restaurants marketed to a general public and more as informal community kitchens serving people far from home.

What the diaspora kitchen reveals is that Bihari food was never actually contained to Bihar — it simply travelled quietly, embedded in communities rather than announced through restaurants with the state's name over the door. Recovering the cuisine's reputation means, in part, tracing these threads back and naming them, rather than treating diaspora food traditions as generically "Indian" when their specific regional origin is knowable and worth knowing.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

The Language of a Bihari Kitchen

A short glossary of words that carry more meaning than their dictionary definitions suggest.

Every regional cuisine has a vocabulary that resists clean translation, and Bihar's is no exception. Understanding a handful of these terms says as much about the cuisine's values as any single recipe could.

Chokha refers less to a single recipe than a method — anything roasted over fire and then mashed by hand with raw mustard oil and aromatics can become a chokha, which is why the dish multiplies so easily across potato, eggplant, tomato, and even boiled egg versions.

Bhunja, roasted or parched grain (usually rice or gram), is both a snack eaten plain with a little salt and chili, and a base ingredient folded into other dishes — a word that, like sattu, describes a preservation technique as much as a finished food.

Ghar ka khana — "home food" — carries particular weight in Bihari households, often used to draw a firm line between what's cooked daily for the family and the elaborate, celebratory food reserved for weddings and festivals. The phrase shows up constantly in how people in the region talk about their own cooking, a built-in humility about the everyday plate that this book has tried to push back against.

WHY THIS MATTERS FOR WRITING ABOUT THE CUISINE

Words like these resist one-line translation because they're doing more than one job — naming an ingredient, a technique, and a category of occasion all at once. Any serious writing about Bihari food benefits from keeping the original terms intact rather than flattening them into their nearest English equivalent.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Epilogue: Toward Recognition

What it would actually take for Bihar's food to be known the way it deserves to be.

Recognition, for a regional cuisine, tends to arrive through a fairly narrow set of doors: a handful of restaurants willing to serve the food without simplifying it, food writers willing to spend the time a cuisine like this demands rather than reaching for the two dishes everyone already knows, and small producers — often, as with makhana and thekua, family businesses rather than large companies — willing to carry a specific dish out of the region and put a name and a story behind it.

Bihar has, in the last several years, started walking through more of those doors than at any point in recent memory. Makhana's

global rise proves that a Bihari staple can command a premium shelf price when the story is told well. The steady migration of litti-chokha stalls into cities far from Bihar proves there's appetite for the food in something closer to its real form, not just a diluted version of it. And a new generation of people with roots in the state, several of them building small food brands rooted in the dishes their own grandmothers made, are doing the quiet work of writing recipes down, standardizing them, and putting them in front of people who never had a reason to look for them before.

> Bihar's food was never missing an audience because it lacked flavor. It was missing the infrastructure — the writing, the branding, the shelf space — that turns a

> regional cuisine into a national conversation.

This book has tried to be a small piece of that infrastructure: an argument, backed by the dishes themselves, that Bihar's culinary identity is not a footnote to North Indian food but a distinct, coherent tradition with its own logic, its own festivals, its own vocabulary, and its own long overdue place at the table.

APPENDIX

The Recipe Companion

Five recipes from across the book, written for a home kitchen outside Bihar.

FROM CHAPTER TWO

Sattu Sharbat (Chilled Sattu Drink)

INGREDIENTS · SERVES 1

- 4 tbsp roasted gram (sattu) flour
- 250 ml cold water
- 1 tsp lemon juice
- 1 small green chili, finely chopped (optional)
- 1 tsp roasted cumin powder
- Salt to taste

- A few mint leaves, chopped

METHOD

1. Whisk the sattu flour with a little water first to form a smooth, lump-free paste.
2. Gradually whisk in the remaining cold water until fully combined and slightly frothy.
3. Stir in lemon juice, cumin powder, salt, and green chili.
4. Top with chopped mint and serve immediately, well chilled.

FROM CHAPTER THREE

Litti-Chokha (Oven Method)

INGREDIENTS · SERVES 4

- *For the litti dough:* 2 cups whole wheat flour, 2 tbsp ghee, water, salt
- *For the stuffing:* 1½ cups sattu flour, 1 tbsp mustard oil, 1 tsp ajwain, 1 tsp kalonji, 1 chopped onion, 2 cloves garlic (minced), 1 chopped green chili, lemon juice, salt
- *For the chokha:* 3 large

potatoes, 1 eggplant, mustard oil, chopped onion, garlic, green chili, coriander

- Melted ghee, for serving

METHOD

1. Knead the wheat flour, ghee, salt, and water into a firm dough. Rest for 20 minutes.
2. Mix all stuffing ingredients with a splash of water until it holds together loosely.
3. Shape dough into small balls, stuff each with the sattu mixture, and seal fully.
4. Bake at 200°C (400°F) for 30–35 minutes, turning once, until deeply browned.
5. Roast the whole potatoes and eggplant directly over a gas flame or under a broiler

until charred and soft. Peel, then mash with mustard oil, onion, garlic, chili, and coriander.

6. Crack the baked litti slightly and dip in melted ghee before serving with the chokha.

FROM CHAPTER FOUR

Ghugni (Stewed Yellow Peas)

INGREDIENTS · SERVES 4

- 1½ cups dried yellow or white peas, soaked overnight
- 2 tbsp mustard oil
- 1 onion, finely chopped
- 1 tbsp ginger-garlic paste
- 1 tomato, chopped
- 1 tsp turmeric, 1 tsp cumin powder, 1 tsp coriander powder, chili powder to taste

- To serve: chopped onion, lime wedges, sev, boiled egg (optional)

METHOD

1. Pressure-cook the soaked peas with salt and turmeric until soft, about 4–5 whistles.
2. Heat mustard oil until it smokes lightly, then sauté onion until golden.
3. Add ginger-garlic paste, cook a minute, then add tomato and remaining spices.
4. Stir in the cooked peas with their liquid and simmer 10–15 minutes until thickened.
5. Serve topped with raw onion, a squeeze of lime, sev, and a boiled egg if desired.

FROM CHAPTER NINE

Thekua (Chhath Jaggery Biscuits)

Ingredients · Makes about 20

- 2 cups whole wheat flour
- ¾ cup jaggery, grated
- ¼ cup ghee, melted
- ½ tsp fennel seeds, lightly crushed
- ¼ cup water (warm, to dissolve jaggery)
- 2 tbsp desiccated coconut (optional)
- Oil, for deep frying

Method

1. Dissolve the jaggery fully in warm water and let it cool slightly.
2. Combine flour, fennel seeds, coconut, and melted ghee; rub together until crumbly.
3. Add the jaggery water gradually, forming a stiff, dry dough. Do not over-knead.
4. Rest 15 minutes, then shape into small flat discs, pressing a decorative pattern with a fork if desired.
5. Deep-fry on low-medium heat for 8–

10 minutes per batch until deep golden brown and firm throughout.

6. Cool completely before storing — thekua keeps well for two to three weeks in an airtight container.

FROM CHAPTER ELEVEN

Til Laddu (Sesame-Jaggery Rounds)

Ingredients · Makes about 15

- 1½ cups white sesame seeds
- 1 cup jaggery, grated
- 2 tbsp ghee
- A pinch of cardamom powder
- Water, for the syrup

Method

1. Dry-roast the sesame seeds over low heat until fragrant and lightly golden. Set aside.
2. Melt the jaggery with a splash of water over low heat until it forms a single thread when dropped in cold water.
3. Stir in the ghee and cardamom, then fold in the roasted sesame seeds off the heat.
4. While still warm, grease your palms and shape the mixture into small, tight rounds.

5. Cool completely before storing in an airtight container.

The Forgotten Flavors of Bihar

A cuisine of rivers, fire, and jaggery — finally getting its name said out loud.